

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

10 November 2011



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

1. Tackling Child Poverty – Making it everyone’s business

1.1 Tackling child poverty has been accepted as a key priority for Plymouth 2020 Partnership and supports the delivery of one of the city and Council’s four priorities – reducing inequalities. As a level one indicator it is championed by the Plymouth Children and Young People’s Trust but also relies heavily on the actions of other strategic groups and organisations across the city. Tackling child poverty is everybody’s business and this is essential if we are to effectively tackle the causes and impact of child poverty.

1.2 Child poverty is a priority in the Children & Young People’s Plan 2011-14 and Cabinet has already approved the higher level aims and actions described within it to tackle child poverty, and with its 2020 partners, asked a multi agency group to develop a wider plan to engage all aspects of work and agencies.

1.3 On the 13th September 2011, Cabinet reaffirmed its commitment to tackling child poverty as outlined within the Children and Young People’s Plan 2011-2014 and approved the attached multi agency delivery plan to cover the whole 2020 Partnership (see appendix 1).

1.4 In order to monitor our progress toward tackling child poverty Cabinet also agreed to receive an annual progress report, including the findings from an annual self-assessment engaging all partners across the city.

1.5 This briefing provides members with an update on our progress so far in developing a citywide approach to tackling child poverty including the accompanying multi agency delivery plan.

2. Understanding child poverty

2.1 The causes and consequences of child poverty, both temporary and persistent, are multiple and complex. Child poverty is not caused simply due to a lack of money in the family - it is the outcome of economic, environmental and social factors and inequalities that can damage a child’s development and limit and prevent children and young people from having many of the experiences and opportunities that others take for granted.

2.2 This understanding of child poverty is reflected in the government’s first national child poverty strategy. This new approach considers children’s longer term development through home life, family, education and health. Building on national consultation and independent reviews by Frank Fields MP and Graham Allen MP, it also recommends a suite of additional measures that reflect family resources, family circumstances and children’s life chances.

2.3 In Plymouth:

- One in four children and young people live in families that receive means tested benefits.
- 63% of all children who had a Child Protection Plan during 2009/10 lived in the two most deprived localities. 'Neglect' is cited as the primary reason for 43% of children with a child protection plan.
- There is an educational attainment gap in the city. Children in receipt of Free School Meals often achieve lower grades than their peers.
- The housing stock condition in the city has deteriorated significantly over the last five years - the most vulnerable families are found in some of the poorest housing across Plymouth.
- The North West and South West localities have the highest proportions of mothers who continue to smoke during pregnancy.

2.4 In addition, the economic climate has a significant damaging impact on our children and young people. Benefit changes that are being phased in affecting 51,000 people in the city will have a damaging impact on lone parents and working families on low incomes. The experience locally is that need and vulnerability is rising. Unemployment is up by 13% in the last year and exceeds 2009 figures with particular peaks in the 18-24 age group.

3. Our progress so far

3.1 A Local Government Group review (May 2011), outlined the key characteristics of local authority areas where child poverty is being addressed as a high priority. These include a high level of strategic commitment and understanding, a view of child poverty as a cross cutting theme across the LA area, as well as strong elected member support. Plymouth already demonstrates such features. The Portfolio holder for Children and Young People has actively championed and provided strong direction on behalf of the Local Authority and Plymouth 2020.

3.2 The local strategic approach to tackling child poverty is already being developed and the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14 has provided a solid base from which to develop a whole city, multi-agency delivery plan, endorsed by Cabinet (see Appendix I). This plan has been developed by key stakeholders including statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector. In addition, child poverty will need to be explicitly addressed within key strategies such as housing, financial inclusion and worklessness.

3.3 A core multi-agency group made up of key stakeholders from across the Local Authority (including housing, economic development, children services and social inclusion), JobCentre Plus, NHS Plymouth, Public Health and the voluntary and community sector has been overseeing the development and implementation of the local strategic approach. The main objectives of which are to:

- Make child poverty everybody's business
- Reduce the number of children living in workless households
- Reduce housing related child poverty
- Reduce the inequalities that have the most negative impact on children's life chances
- Improve young people's capability to manage finances sensibly.

3.4 As part of developing our local strategic approach a self-assessment event was held in October to assess the healthiness and effectiveness of our current approach to tackling child poverty in the city. The self-assessment toolkit used was based on national best practice developed by Save the Children. This toolkit enabled us to assess our city approach to tackling child poverty against three areas; leadership and governance, performance management and commissioning and resources.

3.5 The headline findings from this event identified the following:

3.5.1 Leadership and Governance

Participants wanted a clearer vision for how we as a city will tackle child poverty; this was centred on having a common understanding or definition of child poverty. A need was identified for more coordination to support others to develop their own objectives to support the city vision around child poverty.

3.5.2 Performance Management

Clear performance management arrangements for measuring progress around child poverty are required that build on current 2020 indicators and targets. These need to tell a story about child poverty in Plymouth and relate to a variety of areas e.g. housing, worklessness, transport, education. They should also be used to inform service planning.

3.5.3 Commissioning and Resources

Embedding child poverty within planning, commissioning and resource allocation processes will be key to effectively tackling child poverty in Plymouth. Participants strongly advocated developing a core offer or minimum standard to families to tackle child poverty.

3.6 Based on the need for strong member support the self-assessment will be replicated at an event for elected members on the 18th November 2011. This workshop will provide the opportunity for members to further shape the way in which the city tackles child poverty.

3.7 In addition, ongoing consultation is being undertaken with the Youth Council as part of the Children & Young People's Plan. The Youth Council is very keen to engage with this issue, in particular defining what poverty means to them and their families.

4. Recommendation

4.1 It is recommended that members note the content of this report.

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